COMMENDING THE OUTSTANDING WOMEN OF SOMERSET COUNTY

HON. LEONARD LANCE

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

Mr. LANCE. Madam Speaker, I rise in honor of National Women's History Month, and I would like to congratulate a number of outstanding women who will be recognized at the Somerset County's Commission on the Status of Women awards in New Jersey's Seventh Congressional District.

The Commission presents awards annually in celebration of National Women's History Month in March. This year there are 17 women being honored, including entrepreneurs, educators and hometown heroes whose community service is considered extraordinary.

This year's Distinguished Honoree is Raritan Borough Mayor Jo-Ann Liptak, who is being honored for her decades as a teacher, volunteer work at Somerset Medical Center in Somerville, and her service on the Somerset County Planning Board. She also created the borough's annual John Basilone Memorial parade. Jo-Ann is the third generation in her family to hold office in Raritan Borough, became the municipality's first female mayor in 2007. I am pleased to congratulate Raritan Borough Mayor Jo-Ann Liptak for her outstanding efforts and share her good work with my colleagues in the United States Congress and the American people.

EARMARK DECLARATION

HON. JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR.

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

Mr. DUNCAN. Madam Speaker, consistent with House Republican Earmark Standards, I am submitting the following earmark disclosure information for project requests that I made and which were included within H.R. 1105, the "Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2009."

Requesting Member: Congressman JOHN DUNCAN

Bill Number: H.R. 1105

Account: Corps of Engineers—Section 206

Project Amount: $0—It is a named project.

Legal Name of Requesting Entity: Army Corps of Engineers—Nashville District, PO Box 1070, Nashville, TN 37202.

Description of Request: Maryville, TN is interested in the restoration of the area's hydrology, streambank stabilization, and construction of a sediment basin. Recommended features include sediment removal, bioengineering restorations, and wetland restoration and development.

INTRODUCTION OF "HEALTHCARE ENHANCEMENT FOR LOCAL PUBLIC SERVANTS ACT OF 2009"

HON. JOSEPH CROWLEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

Mr. CROWLEY. Madam Speaker, along with my New York colleague, JOHN MCHUGH, I am pleased to introduce the "Healthcare Enhancement for Local Public Servants Act of 2009" or HELPS II legislation to provide a pretax deduction of up to $3,000 to retired public servants for health or Long Term Care (LTC) insurance premiums.

This legislation builds off the successful language added to the Pension Protection Act (P.L. 109–280), which included a provision permitting retired public safety officers to take up to $3,000 in pre-tax income and use it for health care costs or long term care expenses.

Today, we expand this successful measure to all retired public employee.

This concept was born several years ago during the 108th Congress in the Portman-Cardin pension bill (H.R. 1776) which included language to provide the ability of all retirees to use pre-tax dollars to pay for health plan premiums. Unfortunately, this provision and H.R. 1776 did not become law, and so today we introduce this as a free standing bill.

This language will benefit our nation's hard working public sector retirees.

The average monthly pension benefit of a retired public servant is $1,725 and many do not have Social Security benefits. A significant portion of a retired public servants' monthly pension check is going towards health or Long Term Care insurance premiums. In many cases, the retired public servant is using the entire pension benefit to pay for health insurance premiums.

Additionally, HELPS II would streamline the administrative requirements of the program so that it will run more smoothly for those who already enjoy this tax benefit our nation's retired public safety officers.

Therefore, we are pleased to introduce this legislation and will work for its enactment to ensure that all of our nation's retired public safety officers and all of our nation's retired public servants have a streamlined ability to pay for health and long term care costs in their golden years.

INTRODUCTION OF THE HEALTHCARE ENHANCEMENT FOR LOCAL PUBLIC SERVANTS ACT OF 2009

HON. JOHN M. McHUGH

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

Mr. MCHUGH. Madam Speaker, I rise today as a proud cosponsor of the Healthcare Enhancement for Local Public Servants Act of 2009, or HELPS II, Act. I appreciate the work my friend, Mr. CROWLEY, has done to develop this important legislation, which would make health care and Long Term Care (LTC) premiums more affordable for retired public servants.

Currently, active American workers who participate in a cafeteria plan option known as "premium conversion" may elect to reduce their taxable wages by having their share of health insurance premiums paid on a pretax basis. Such an arrangement reduces both income and employment taxes. Since October 2000, this option has been available to federal employees who participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP). This option is also available to private sector and state or local government employees with their employers' permission.

Generally, premium conversion is not available to retirees. This is so because of an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) determination that distributions from qualified retirement plans are always subject to taxes, aside from several minor exceptions. Consequently, retirees are precluded from recasting pension payments as pretax income and thus denied this tax benefit.

The Pension Protection Act of 2006 (P.L. 109–280) allows certain retired public safety officers to pay up to $3,000 of qualified health insurance and/or Long Term Care (LTC) insurance premiums from their pensions on a pretax basis. This tax advantage, which makes health care more affordable, has become increasingly important as health insurance premiums have increased in recent years.

While I support making premium conversion available to all Americans, a good first step would be to make it available to retired state and local public employees through the enactment of the Healthcare Enhancement for Local Public Servants Act of 2009. Accordingly, I look forward to working with the Gentleman from New York to enact this measure.

ALLISON HARMON, DISTINGUISHED FINALIST, 2009 PRUDENTIAL SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY AWARDS

HON. ROSCOE G. BARTLETT

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

Mr. BARTLETT. Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate and honor a young student from my district who has achieved national recognition for exemplary volunteer service in her community. Allison Harmon of Hampstead has been named a distinguished finalist by the 2009 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program, an annual honor conferred on the most impressive student volunteers in each state and the District of Columbia.

Ms. Harmon has been an active community volunteer, going back to the sixth grade. She has coordinated drives to collect school supplies, clothing, food and toys for the needy; tutored and mentored young students; volunteered at hospitals; and participated in many other service activities.

I believe it is vital that we encourage and support the kind of selfless contribution that Allison has made. People of all ages need to think more about how we, as individual citizens, can work together at the local level to ensure the health and vitality of our towns and neighborhoods.

I heartily applaud Ms. Harmon for her initiative in seeking to make her community a better place to live, and for the positive impact she has had on the lives of others. Her actions show that young Americans can—and do—play important roles in our communities, and that America's community spirit continues to hold tremendous promise for the future.

Young volunteers like Allison are inspiring examples to all of us, and are among our brightest hopes for a better tomorrow.